



Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD): Biblical Perspectives

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***“There is a way that seems right to a man, but
its end is the way to death.” – Proverbs 14:12***



Differing Viewpoints

› Brittany Maynard

- 29yo young woman diagnosed with terminal brain cancer in 2014
- Diagnosed in January, this video was made in October
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GXgNmHdVRLY>
- She eventually took prescribed medications to end her life on Nov. 2

› Lauren Hill

- 19yo young woman diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer in her senior year of high school
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwP1ZhpwX70>
- She would later succumb to her illness in her first year of university



Reflections

1. Compare & contrast Brittany's and Lauren's perspectives on their illness.
2. What are your feelings/reactions to these two women?
3. What issues/questions are raised in your mind?
4. Why is "assisted death" a big deal in our society today?



Why is MAiD a big deal?

- › People with terminal illnesses suffer terribly - we ought to help!
 - Physical suffering
 - › Pain
 - › Breathlessness
 - › Nausea
 - Emotional suffering
 - Social suffering
 - › One of the most common reasons for MAiD request is a sense of “burden” to others
 - Existential suffering



Why is MAiD a big deal?

- › Life is at risk!
 - Physical death
 - Eternal death
- › **We do a huge disservice to suffering people when all that we do is concede to their wishes**
- › **Yet, we do them an equally great disservice when all that we offer them is, “you shouldn’t do that.”**
- › **MAiD demands a truthful yet gracious (and practical) response!**



Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)

- › Use of medical means for the express purpose of effecting death (as a “treatment option” for certain terminal illnesses)
- › Related terms
 - Physician-Assisted Suicide
 - “Mercy Killing”
 - Voluntary Euthanasia
 - › Euthanasia (“eu” – good + “thanatos” – death)
 - “Dying with Dignity”
- › What are some underlying presuppositions/assumptions in support of MAiD?



Underlying Assumptions

- › I am the master of my destiny, therefore I can choose how I live and how I die
 - Autonomy is the highest of all ethical principles
- › Suffering is bad and meaningless; so why go through it?
- › The dying person is a burden to those around him/her
- › Death is the end of suffering – therefore, MAiD is the response of compassion to those who are suffering intolerably
- › **It has everything to do with one's worldview!**



Global practices in MAiD

- › 1950s and onward - “institutionalization of care”
- › 1998 – US state of Oregon legalized assisted suicide
- › 2000 – the Netherlands legalized euthanasia
- › 2002 – Belgium and Luxembourg legalized euthanasia
 - A few other countries have since joined – eg. Switzerland, Colombia
- › 2008 – US state of Washington legalized assisted suicide
 - Montana, California, Colorado, Washington DC, Vermont have all since legalized this practice
 - Many other states are considering similar legislations
 - “qualifications” for MAiD vary amongst states/countries



MAiD in Canada

- › Up until Feb, 2015, assisted suicide was a criminal act
- › Carter vs. Canada brought about an historic change
 - Ms. Gloria Taylor
 - Ms. Lee Carter & Mr. Hollis Johnson
 - Dr. William Shoichet
 - British Columbia Civil Liberties Association
- › As of June, 2017, MAiD has been decriminalized and legalized



MAiD in Canada

- › The practice itself
 - Clinician-administered
 - Self-administered
- › Current qualifying criteria for MAiD
 - Be at least 18yo and mentally competent
 - Have a grievous and irremediable medical condition
 - › Death must be reasonably foreseeable
 - Makes a voluntary request for MAiD
 - Gives informed consent for MAiD
 - 10 day “reflection period” between approval and procedure



Thinking about MAiD

- › Different approaches when considering MAiD (eg. medical, ethical, religious), focus today is on the biblical perspective

- 1. Does the Bible speak explicitly about assisted suicide?

- 2. What biblical principles would you consider when thinking about this subject?



Biblical Perspectives

1. Life – who holds ultimate control?

- Job 1:21
- Ps. 104:27-30
- Ps. 139:16
- 1 Cor. 6:19-20



Biblical Perspectives

2. Life – what is the source of humanity’s value?

- Gen. 1:26-27
 - › Sin has defaced the image of God in human beings, but it has not effaced it
- Gen. 9:5-6
- Exod. 20:6
- Exod. 21:14
- Ps. 139:13-15

- Life has intrinsic value regardless of its function (or lack thereof) and regardless of one’s opinion of whether it has value or not
- Life must never be regarded as a burden, no matter what state it is in



Biblical Perspectives

3. Life – are human beings autonomous creatures?

- Gen. 2:18 – it is not good for man to be alone
- The whole biblical witness testifies to the fact that to be human is to be in community
 - › God’s design is that we are dependent on one another
- This is no less true when facing death and suffering
 - › This is a crucial perspective for those who may feel that they’re a burden just because they are dependent on caregivers
 - › Being dependent is actually being human – a counter-contemporary concept



Biblical Perspectives

4. Death – is it the end of suffering?

– Origin of death

- › Gen. 3 – the Fall (sin) introduced death as an unavoidable aspect of existence
 - Death therefore stands against God’s original design and intent for creation
- › Rom. 6:23 – death is the consequence of sin
 - Just as it is right to oppose sin, so it is right to oppose death
 - Corollary: we should not choose to “side” with death; death is never a friend/ally

– Consequences of death

- › Jesus in the parables
 - Matt. 13:50; Mark 9:48, Matt. 25:41, Luke 16:19-31
- › 2 Thess. 1:8-9
- › Jude 1:7



Biblical Perspectives

5. Suffering – is it devoid of meaning?

- Suffering is an inevitable aspect of human existence after the Fall
 - › Rom. 8:18-23
- What good is suffering then?
 - › 2 Cor. 12:7-10
 - › Ps. 34:18
 - › 2 Cor. 1:4
 - › 2 Cor. 4:17-18
- Other resources to consider:
 - › <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI22o5u32z0> - Joni Eareckson
 - › The Scars that have Shaped Me – Vaneetha Risner
 - › Suffering and the Sovereignty of God – John Piper/Justin Taylor
 - › Walking with God through Pain and Suffering – Tim Keller



Biblical Perspectives

6. The gospel and suffering

- At the Cross, we see that God has known suffering intimately
- At the Cross, we know that the God is present with those who suffer
- At the Cross, we recognize that even suffering is not meaningless
- The Cross paves the way to Resurrection Day



Response

- › How then do we respond to someone with unimaginable suffering who is contemplating MAiD?
 - With both truth and compassion (“with” + “suffer”)
 - AND remembering that our own humanity is shriveled when we “discard and dispose of” those who are weak, disabled, sick, suffering
- › **Not only do we need to think rightly on this issue, we must present a plausible, a more attractive alternative**
- › Characteristics of our response - **gospel-centred**
 - Empathy
 - Compassion/Presence
 - Hope



Response

› As a community of believers...

- We do this together in community
- We recognize that suffering is unimaginably horrible
 - › we listen, we acknowledge, we do not minimize, we do not “moralize”
- We are present with the sufferer
 - › we weep with, we laugh with, we remember with, we pray with, we read with, we sit with (in silence), we suffer with, we serve
- We recognize that life is meaningful even in the context of suffering
 - › we encourage, we “cheer on”, we point out meaning
- We recognize that both resurrection and Resurrection await
 - › we remind, we hope with, we read to, we point to



Response

› As a community of believers...

- We need to present a better narrative
- ~~“Dying with Dignity”~~ → “Living with Dignity”
- Isn’t it far more “dignified” to say to someone.....?
 - › “Your life is worth every last moment, so I am here to help you live to your fullest even in your suffering.”
instead of.....
 - › “Your life now is no longer meaningful, so I’m here to help you end it.”



Response

› On a societal level...

- We recognize that MAiD does not only affect the person who is suffering
 - › We want to protect those who are equally vulnerable
 - The elderly, the disabled, the mentally ill
- We take care not to attack individual sufferers who make these decisions
- We need to have a larger vision of abundant life in the face of what may seem impossible
 - › Louis Braille, William Wilberforce
- We advocate for excellent palliative care
- We make the gospel known – in word and deed



Caveat

- › What if a believer decides to go through with MAiD? Is he/she condemned forever?
 - The unpardonable sin is NOT suicide
 - In God’s great mercy, Christ’s forgiveness is “big” enough to cover over even the sin of ending one’s own life
 - Neither you nor I have ever asked for forgiveness for every individual sin that we have committed (commission and omission)
 - › Yet, upon turning over our lives to Christ in saving faith, we’re forgiven of every sin (past, present and future) and inherit eternal life
 - Nevertheless, even as we recognize that Jesus’ offer of grace is greater than our worst sins, we do not take suicide (by any means) lightly